

Testimony in favor of S.B. 184 , AN ACT EXTENDING THROUGH NOVEMBER 8, 2022, SEVERAL CHANGES REGARDING ELECTION ADMINISTRATION AS A RESULT OF COVID-19 AND CONCERNING ELIGIBILITY TO VOTE BY ABSENTEE BALLOT and HB 5262 AN ACT REVISING CERTAIN ABSENTEE VOTING ELIGIBILITY STATUTES .

Co-Chairs Flexer and Fox, Vice-Chairs Haskell and Thomas, Ranking Members Sampson and Mastrofrancesco, and other committee members. My name is Karen Edwards. I live in Stamford. I am a Professor of Public Health and a retired pediatrician/ public health professional. **I'm testifying in support of S.B. 184, AN ACT EXTENDING THROUGH NOVEMBER 8, 2022, SEVERAL CHANGES REGARDING ELECTION ADMINISTRATION AS A RESULT OF COVID-19 AND CONCERNING ELIGIBILITY TO VOTE BY ABSENTEE BALLOT and HB 5262, AN ACT REVISING CERTAIN ABSENTEE VOTING ELIGIBILITY STATUTES .**

We in Connecticut are very fortunate to be experiencing a downward trend in COVID infection right now, but we know that COVID still presents risks, and that it is possible, and even probable, that we will experience another upswing in infections, especially as the weather turns colder in the fall.

Let's prepare now to make sure that ALL registered voters in CT have the fullest opportunity, during 2022, to exercise their right and duty to vote and to do it safely, in the midst of the continuing pandemic.

If registered voters do not have the option of voting absentee, there are many scenarios that will play out during the continuing pandemic that will restrict the right to vote, due to voter concern about exposing themselves to indoor activities, and due to unpredictable events that occur during pandemics. For instance, the day before the mid-term elections in November, a parent could learn that the day care center to which she sends her two children has closed for a week due to a several new cases of COVID among children and staff, so she must stay home to care for her children and thus will not be able to exercise her right to vote. If someone tests positive for COVID two days before the election and must therefore be in isolation, he will not be able to exercise his right to vote on election day. These and many similar scenarios will not be uncommon. All registered CT voters should be able to apply for absentee ballots in advance if they wish to do so, to bank against the inevitable, but personally unpredictable, consequences of an ongoing pandemic.

These bills allow our elected officials to assure that no registered CT voter will be deprived of the opportunity to exercise their right and duty to vote. This is also an opportunity to provide all registered voters the ability to vote safely during a pandemic. Lawmakers will, by passing these bills, create a safer environment for election staff and volunteers at polling places, since a smaller proportion of voters will choose to vote in person, resulting in less crowding.

There is no downside to allowing all registered voters who wish to vote by absentee ballot instead of in person to do so during the continuing pandemic in 2022. The significant upside to these bills is that no voter will be deprived of their right and duty to vote due to the circumstances of the pandemic.

I strongly urge passage of SB 184 and HB 5262. Thank you to the committee for hearing my testimony on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Karen Edwards MD MPH, Stamford, CT